The Good, Beautiful, And True Is In Us

By Thich Nhat Hanh

Dear friends, today is the 20th of November 1997, we are in the New Hamlet. There is a French writer whose name is Antoine de Saint Exupéry. He said that to love each other doesn't mean we sit and look at each other, but it means we both look in the same direction. We have to look deeply to see whether in our experience this is true or not, and if it's true, to what degree it is true. When we love each other, we have a natural tendency to look at each other. Because each one of us has lacks, needs, desires. We want beauty we are thirsty for beauty. We respect and look up to truth, and we are thirsty for truth. We are thirsty for sincerity. So we are looking for something sacred, something beautiful, something good, and something wholesome. And then we will feel we don't lack, and we will feel less lonely, at a loss.

The beautiful, the true and the good which we look for is something we look for in a person, and we think that there are few people who have that thing. But we have a wrong perception. Because sometimes the beauty we think is real beauty is not true beauty. The truth is not real truth and we think it's real truth. And the wholesome, we think it is true, but it's not real goodness. So if we are basing on our wrong perception then our love can arise based on that wrong perception. And when we have lived with that person for a period of time, we discover that we have failed. Because that person is not able to symbolize for us the beautiful, good, and true that we were looking for and we say that person has deceived us, and we suffer. And then we go and look for a second object.

Every one of us in the beginning feels that we lack something, that we are only half a person. And we wander around in this world to look for our other half. We're like a saucepan that hasn't got a lid, and we're always going looking for our lid. That is why we feel we lack the other person. But if we observe carefully, we see that this feeling of lack arises from a wrong perception. We have an inferiority complex that the true, the good, and the beautiful do not exist in us. That is a very deep complex in every one of us. We have a perception that we are not worthy. No truth, no beauty, no goodness is in us. And there is no way that we can have confidence in ourselves. We don't say these things, but it is what we feel. We feel that we haven't any beauty, goodness and truth.

But we always want to do something in order to have these things. And so we feel that we are deceiving people. We are showing other people that we are good, that we are beautiful, but we feel that we are only showing that on the outside. In ourselves, we are not really beautiful, not really good. And so we go and look for different cosmetics in order to adorn ourselves. We go to shops which sell cosmetics, and we buy powder, we buy lipstick and we put it on our lips. Or we use some kind of operation to make us look more beautiful, like a facelift. This is to do with our body. But as far as our soul, our spirit, our mind is concerned, we can go and learn more philosophy, more science to have

more knowledge, or we can go and study religion. We go and study with this master, then we go to that master. And we also make it look as if we have virtue, that we love others. As far as physical appearance is concerned, we can adorn ourselves, with cosmetics, make ourselves look beautiful. And as far as our mind, our spirit is concerned we can also find cosmetics to adorn our mind, because we want people when they look at us to see us as something good and beautiful and true. And we deceive each other.

In this world, on this earth we are deceiving each other. Deep down we feel there is nothing good, beautiful and true in us. But on the other hand, we are trying to show people all the time the good, beautiful, and true that we are. And so we deceive ourselves from generation to generation. And when we are deceiving others, we are also being deceived by others. We are each other's victims. We are all deceiving each other, we are all trying to make ourselves up so we will look less ugly, and at the same time others are doing the same.

Sitting at the foot of the bodhi tree on the night when he realized the truth, the Buddha discovered something, which is very surprising to him and to us. He saw that the good, the beautiful and the true are to be found in everyone. But very few people know that. People think that the true, the beautiful, and the good exist somewhere else it is in someone else. They do not know that in the deep levels of themselves there is the true, the beautiful, and the good. And because we are not able to be in touch with these things, the good, the beautiful, and the true, in ourselves, we have the feeling that we lack something, that we are a saucepan without a lid. And the whole of our life we are looking for someone else to replace that lack. How strange, all living beings have the fully awakened nature, but none of them know it. And because of that they drift and sink from lifetime to lifetime in the great ocean of samsara, in suffering. And that is what the Buddha said the moment when he realized the path.

And so when we are able to recognize that in us there is the essence of the good, the beautiful and the true, we will be able to stop going in search. We will stop feeling that we lack something and we will stop running around in the world, in the universe looking for something. The truth is that we return to ourselves in order to be in touch with the good, beautiful and true that are in us. And at the moment we are in touch with those things, we are able to stop wandering around feeling we lack something. And we are able to stop deceiving others. We don't have to adorn ourselves, make ourselves up anymore, because we have discovered the true, the beautiful, and the good right here within us.

Like a wave on the ocean. It feels that it is fragile, that it is ugly; the other waves are more beautiful, more high, with more value. It has an inferiority complex, the complex that it's not worth anything. But when this wave is able to be in touch with its true nature, which is the water, it sees that water goes beyond all concepts of beautiful, ugly, high, low, here and there. Whether it's a large wave or a small wave, half a wave or a third of a wave, it is still made out of water. Once it knows that it is water, it has a very strong faith that it has absolute value because water is without birth and without death. A wave is really only water, and as far as water is concerned, all waves are equal because all waves are water. So everyone who lives in this world-- women, men, rich, poor, intellectual, those who have been disabled, those whose body is in good health-- they all have this basis of good, beautiful and true. Just as the small wave, the big wave, the high wave, the low wave, all waves are equal, wholly equal as far as water is concerned, as far as their true nature is concerned.

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When we are looking for someone to love and we find that person, we are very happy because we feel we have found our lid, the lid of our saucepan. We are happy because we think that the person we have discovered has the true, the good and the beautiful in them. There is a song: "You are as gentle as a nun..." But it's not so sure that a nun is gentle. When you have lived with that person for a short time, you see that that person is quite fierce, not gentle at all, and not beautiful and not wholesome like you thought before. And then we no longer have faith in our lid. We say the other person is deceiving us, they have deceived us into thinking they are good, beautiful, and true. But we have already written the contract and we are caught with that person, and we have a lot of irritation, and we have a feeling that we have been deceived. And it is very painful for us to have to live with that person. We want to divorce them and go and live with somebody else. And we feel like that our whole life. We never feel we have found the good, the beautiful and the true in the other. Because everyone wants to adorn themselves with good, beautiful and true in order to show others that we have those things, which the other is looking for. But we don't really believe ourselves that we have those things, and that is where our suffering starts from. We don't have faith that we have the things we are showing others

we have. And we are looking for those things in another, and then we feel we've been deceived just as we deceive others. And so we fall into the same situation, the one who looks and the one who is looked for. After we have failed many times, we have felt tired of this person; we feel they don't have the essence we are looking for.

Then we go and look for a religious teacher. And when we find a religious teacher, we kneel before him, and we feel we have found our real lid. But there are many religious teachers who are fake, many religious teachers who do not have faith in the goodness, truth and beauty in themselves but try to show others that they have beauty, goodness and truth. So there are disciples, students, who after a time of learning with that teacher, discover he hasn't got the things they were looking for in him. There's not something really beautiful, something really true, something really good in that person. So we abandon that teacher and we go and look for another one. And if we continue like that, we are constantly throughout our life looking for someone.

Then one day we meet a very special religious teacher. And that religious teacher says, "Don't go looking anymore, don't go seeking anymore, don't keep looking outside of your anymore, because within you the thing you are looking for is already there." And that teacher is our root teacher. Our root teacher tells us: "All living beings have the pure, clear, complete nature within themselves." And everyone has to return to themselves in order to be in touch properly with that beautiful, good and true which is within them. And when you have been in touch with it, you will put an end to your going in search and there will be a steady faith that you have happiness, you have peace. And this searching, which has been going on for so many lifetimes will come to an end.

The World Honored One is a religious teacher who doesn't want us to be slaves the whole of our life. He doesn't want people to just lean on him. So the Buddha is a special teacher. He says that: "You have what you are looking for within yourself." So a real religious teacher, someone who is worthy of being called a religious teacher, is a teacher who has the capacity to show us that in our own nature there is a teacher we can return to and take refuge in. And we don't have to look for this teacher outside of ourselves. And that is a teaching, which is very basic to Buddhism. That the beautiful, the wholesome, and the absolute good are present in ourselves, and we only need to return and be in touch with them. You need to have faith in the basic goodness, the basic beauty, and the basic truth, which is in you. You have to go back to yourself and discover that. It is your own ground of being. It is your basis.

When we look at the person we love, we need to begin to look with these eyes. We look at the person sitting in front of us, and we say: "This person has the basic goodness, the basic truth, and the basic beauty, but that person doesn't believe in those things, and that person is using cosmetics to adorn themselves for us." And we are the same. We do not believe in the good, beautiful and true, which is in us, but we are putting on cosmetics to adorn ourselves for the other person. And when we can do that, then real love begins to arise in us. We say to the other, "Let's not live in this narrow way anymore. Let's both return to our own basis. Let's not deceive each other anymore." We don't need to deceive each other because the thing we are looking for is already there in us, and we have to become friends on the path of the practice. And that path of practice is not to lead us on an outer search but to lead us on an inner search.

Ánanda was the cousin of the Buddha. One day he was going on the alms round. He stopped at a well because he was thirsty in order to ask for some water. Sitting by the well was a young woman called Matanga. She belonged to the pariah class, the untouchable caste. The higher castes were not able to touch her or come near to her on the path because she would pollute them. When the higher castes are going on the road and they see an untouchable, they have to keep out of their way so as not to be polluted. And when Ánanda asked for water, she said, "No, I can't give it to you because I am an untouchable and it will pollute you." And Ánanda said, "In our teaching, there is not a caste division and the Buddha has told us that we are all equal, and therefore you can give me water, I won't be polluted, so don't be afraid." Matanga was very happy. She lifted the water with a ladle and gave it to him to drink. He joined his palms and thanked her and went home. But after that Matanga started to fall in love with him. She couldn't sleep, she couldn't eat, because she kept seeing Ánanda, how beautiful, how good, how kind he was. Matanga was very beautiful. Her father had passed away she lived with her mother. And when her mother saw she couldn't sleep or eat for many weeks, she asked why. The girl wept and said because she is always thinking about Ánanda. And because the mother loved her daughter very much, she did her best to help her daughter. So they decided together to invite Ánanda to come and to make offerings to him. And one day they met Ánanda as he was going on the alms round, and they invited him to come to them so they could make offerings. And when he came into the house, they gave him a bowl of tea. But that tea was made of a kind of herb, which would take away our clarity when we drank it. And if we lack our

clarity, we can do things we don't want to do. When Ánanda had drunk this tea, he felt he had made a mistake and he didn't know how he was going to put it right. When he saw what had happened, he knew that he had to practice. So he didn't say anything, he didn't do anything. He sat in the cross-legged position, and he began to follow the practice of following his breathing, because he knew he was in a very dangerous position. And the Buddha was in the Jeta Grove and wondered why Ánanda had not returned. So he ordered two other monks to go and look for Ánanda. And the other two monks were able to find Ánanda sitting in meditation in the house of Matanga. They led him back to the Jeta Grove Monastery. And they saw Matanga weeping so they also brought her back to the monastery. When Ánanda came back to the monastery the effect of the tea was already wearing off, and he prostrated to the Buddha, and he thanked the Buddha for sending the two monks to send him back because it could have been very dangerous if they hadn't. And then Matanga came in, and the Buddha asked Matanga to sit down. And he said, "Do you love Ánanda so much?" And Matanga said, "Yes, I love him very much." And Buddha said, "What do you love in Ánanda? Do you love his eyes or his nose?" "I love his eyes, I love his nose, I love his ears, I love his mouth, I love everything. Everything to do with Ánanda, I love. I think I cannot live if I don't have Ánanda." She was a very beautiful girl although she belonged to the untouchable caste. She was quite naive too; she was about 18 or 19 years old. The Buddha said, "There are many things in Ánanda which you have not seen and which you would love even more if you could see them." And she said, "What?" And Buddha smiled and said, "Like Ánanda's love, like Ánanda's bodhicitta. All you've seen is eyes, nose, ears, mouth. As a young man, he has given up his life in a wealthy family in order to become a monk, with the aim of helping many people. Ánanda could never be happy with one or two people because that happiness is so small. That is why he became a monk. He wants to be able to help many, many people. He has a mind of great equality. He wants to love, but not love one person. He wants to love thousands and thousands of people. And that bodhicitta of Ánanda is very beautiful; if only you could see it you would love Ánanda even more. And once you had seen that you wouldn't want to make Ánanda your own anymore. You would respect Ánanda, and you would do everything you could to help Ánanda realize his deep aspiration as a monk, to help him realize the bodhicitta. Ánanda is like a cool breeze in the air, and if you love that cool breeze in the air and you want to put it into a small box and put the lid on and turn the key, then you will not have that cool breeze in the air anymore. Ánanda is like a cloud floating in the sky, the blue sky, very beautiful. If you want to catch that cloud and put it in a box and turn the key, then you will kill Ánanda, because you have only seen the things about Ánanda, which are not the most beautiful things. You have not seen the most beautiful things about Ánanda. If you were to see them you would love him more, and you would love him in a way, which would help him be Ánanda, just as you can help a cloud be a cloud floating in the beautiful blue sky. Don't think that Ánanda is the only one who has that beautiful aspiration. You are the same. You have that beauty too. You can also live like Ánanda if you really love Ánanda and you are able to see the bodhicitta of Ánanda. You will be able to return to yourself and see you have the bodhicitta in yourself, and you can vow to Ánanda that you will live in such a way not just to make one person happy but to make many people happy."

When Matanga heard that, she was very surprised. She said, "I don't have any worth. I belong to the lowest caste. I cannot make anybody happy." He said, "Yes, you have already done it. You already have that beautiful, good and true in yourself. Everyone has that. And if we return, and we are able to be in touch with that basic goodness, truth and beauty in ourselves we will have faith in it, and we will know that we can make happiness for many people." And when she heard that, she said, "Is that really so? Can I really do the same as Ánanda? Can I really leave the family life, become a nun and help thousands of people like Ánanda?" And the Buddha said, "Yes, why not? If you can be in touch with the true, good and beautiful in you, and you give rise to the bodhicitta you will be like Ánanda, you will be able to do like Ánanda and bring happiness to many people. " Her insight was opened by the Buddha, and she touched the earth before the Buddha, and she asked to become a nun under a Bhiksunis so that she could do like Ánanda, so that her love could open up and become wide, become measureless. From then on Matanga was accepted into the Bhiksunis Sangha which was led by Maha Gautami.

And that is Buddha's method. In the first place people are infatuated by an image, which they say is beautiful, and they want to be a possessor of that image, and they suffer because of that. But afterwards they wake up and they see that this is deceptive, and they put away that image and they look for another object. And then they wander the whole of their life, from lifetime to lifetime, not able to find the real object of their love. The Buddha showed people that when we are able to come across someone who has a steady faith in their own goodness, beauty and truth, we can look at that person as a mirror in order to return to ourselves and be in touch with the basic goodness, beauty and truth in ourselves. And then we will be happy; we will be able to put an end to our wandering. And like the other person, we can become someone who loves all species, not the one object of love of one person. And we become someone who

serves others. We become an associate lover with the other. The Buddha is someone who loves all species and his action is the action of love. That is all he does in his life, and he rescues beings all his life. And when we see the beauty of the Buddha, the goodness of the Buddha, the truth of the Buddha, when we hear the Buddha say that you also have that goodness, beauty, and truth and if you can go back to yourself, you will find it, then you can become an associate of mine and together we will use our love to help others suffer less.

Love is not a matter of two people loving each other but a matter of collective love. When we enter the monk-hood or nun-hood, it is because we want to love others. And the object of our love, of course, is ourselves and is all species. That is why we have the expression "associate lovers." Buddha is someone who loves, and the Buddha's love is so great, so beautiful we want to take part in that love. We want to be a participator in that love. And the Buddha says, "Yes, why can't you participate in that love? Why don't we become lovers together?" And we take the hand of the Buddha, like teacher and disciple, and we love each other but we love all species, so we and the Buddha are associate lovers. When we are participators in the Sangha, we are associate lovers. We protect ourselves, we protect each other, we give faith to each other, and we bring to others our transformation and their transformation when they are in touch with us.

In the time of the Buddha, there was a monk whose name was Vaikali. After Vaikali became a monk, he became very attached to the Buddha, but his love was narrow, just superficial. He saw the Buddha as something like a realm of light. When he sat near the Buddha, he felt very happy, and that's all he wanted. He didn't really listen deeply or carefully to the dharma talks. He just spent his time looking at the Buddha, gazing at the Buddha. He felt so peaceful, so happy, so content sitting by the Buddha. But he could only see the small beauty of the Buddha. He didn't see the great wisdom, the great love of the Buddha. And after a time, when the Buddha had been looking at him, the Buddha saw that this disciple was still very weak. Wherever he was, he just wanted to be with the Buddha. Wherever he sat, he just wanted to sit near the Buddha. He was attached to the Buddha, but he was just attached to the shadow of the Buddha, not to the real, deep level of the Buddha. Then the Buddha decided he wouldn't allow Vaikali to be near him anymore. If he was going to the Jeta Monastery, he wouldn't allow Vaikali to go with him. And he did not allow him to be his attendant, he said, "Now another monk will be my attendant." So he felt the Buddha had thrown him off, that the Buddha didn't love him. And when he had been refused by the Buddha, he felt like committing suicide. The Buddha knew that this was happening so he tried to find a way to save him. And when he was about to commit suicide, the Buddha came and said, "What are you doing?" And he gave teachings to Vaikali. And that is when he learned that his love was not the deep love of a monk but a superficial attachment. After that, he practiced properly. The Buddha showed him that in his own self, deep down, there was the beautiful, the good and true, and he should be looking for that instead of running out after an image of good, beautiful and true outside of him. The Buddha said he always did that himself and he taught others to do that. A good religious teacher is someone who can show us that in our own self we have a religious teacher, and we have to take refuge in that religious teacher in ourselves and we should not be attached to a religious teacher outside of us. Because that religious teacher outside of us may not be true, may be a fake. And if he is a true teacher he will always encourage us to go back to ourselves, to be in touch with the true teacher within ourselves. The best teacher is the teacher who can help you to see that there is a real teacher within yourself. We take refuge in that teacher within ourselves, and then we will never be disappointed. If a wave has faith in its nature of water, then the wave will never be disappointed. When we read: "I go back and take refuge in the Buddha in myself, and I vow that all beings may be in touch with the awakened nature and quickly realize the love which is called bodhicitta" -that love in which teacher and disciple are working together, are serving together, are associate lovers- this shows us our path, those two lines of the sutra show us the path.

The real object of our love is not outside of us, the real object of our love is ourselves. We have to know how to love ourselves, know how to return to our true nature, to see the wholesome, the good, the true and the beautiful within us. Then we will be able to see that in others. When we have seen real beauty, goodness, and truth in ourselves and others, we will no longer be deceived by the outer adornments. When we see the people in the world are deceiving each other, we feel compassion and we pray that one day they may wake up and find the object of their search within themselves. And when we have found that object of our search in ourselves, we will help others, and we will stop our wandering from one lifetime to another.

We can begin by looking deeply at inter-being. The thing, which we say is beautiful, may not be beautiful, but we think it is beautiful. The thing that we say is true maybe it is not true, but we have thought it is true. The thing, which

we say is wholesome, is kind may not be true kindness, but we think it is true kindness. Therefore, we should use the looking deeply of the Buddha and see that the true goodness contains the true beauty and the true truth. That is inter-being. When we see that, we will discover quickly that the object we thought was beautiful is not really beautiful because it does not contain goodness and truth. And once we know it is a fake, it will not appear beautiful to us anymore. Truth is always beautiful. Kindness is always beautiful. And beauty is always true, is always kind. When we love someone we have the duty to look at that person in such a way that our look is not caught in wrong perceptions, perverted perceptions, so that we can see the real beauty, the real truth, the real goodness of that person and not be deceived by the outer form. We should be able to see that the other is basically beautiful, basically good and true and does not need to disguise themselves with artificial means. So please, you don't need to deceive yourself and deceive me anymore with outer adornments. I am also like that. I have the basic goodness, truth and beauty, so I don't need to adorn myself to deceive people anymore. Let us be associate lovers in order to be in touch with the beauty, goodness, and truth within ourselves, and we will be able to help ourselves and help numberless other people. That is the path of the Buddha. Whether we are a monk or a nun or not a monk or a nun, we have to see this and we have to stop deceiving ourselves and deceiving others and allowing others to deceive us. So we must stop deceiving others and allowing others to deceive us. It is because we don't know that we have the good, the beautiful and true in us that we feel we lack something. When we feel we lack something, we feel we're just a half, we are isolated, we need to find our other half. When we have seen that the thing we are looking for is within us, the feeling of isolation will end and we will begin to feel happy, that is the great awakening. And once we are awakened like that we will understand what the Buddha meant when he said on the day he realized awakening, "How strange, all living beings have the basic nature of awakening, of happiness, of truth, but they don't know it." And because of that, from lifetime to lifetime, they continue drifting and sinking on the ocean of birth and death.

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